



Co-op Profiles

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Urban Camp Melbourne

By David Griffiths
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Turnover: \$590,000
Members: 750
Employees: 13
Directors: 8
Established: 1989

Anzac Hall is part of the Urban Camp. It was built between 1940 and 1941 for the RSL as a cinema and recreation hall for troops at Royal Park.

In 1942 a large part of Royal Park was used as a staging camp for US troops on route to the Pacific. The Americans called their area Camp Pell.

After the war Royal Park was the principal demobilisation centre for all Victorian service personnel and the area known as Camp Pell was used by the Housing Commission for emergency public housing until its demolition during a clean up campaign for the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne.

The clearance left the Anzac Hall - a derelict building.

The origins for the eventual establishment of the Urban Camp Melbourne Co-operative were teachers from the Kensington Community School, Kerry O'Neill and Bill Deveney.



Urban Camp, Royal Park, Victoria

In 1984 their starting point was to provide an alternative classroom for students at the Community School.

At the time Anzac Hall was being used at weekends for calisthenics. The teachers thought that the Hall could be used during the week for activities and include accommodation.

Funds for this were obtained - for a Federal Government job creation project for the long-term unemployed - funding that enabled the employment of staff.

The building was only used Monday-Friday and for this a lease was organised through the City of Melbourne which manages Royal Park for the Crown.

The Community School teachers had friends who were teaching in country Victoria and the idea emerged of providing affordable accommodation in Melbourne for country/rural schools. This also began in the late 1980's.

An informal committee was established to co-ordinate activities at Anzac Hall.

This continued for several years and by 1987 serious discussions began on the future structure and operations.



Urban Camp, Royal Park, Victoria

The founders and others who had become involved were involved in the establishment of various co-operatives and social enterprises in Kensington.

It was not surprising, therefore, that they opted for incorporation as a co-operative which they believed represented a community based enterprise that involved the input of the socially minded groups with some degree of autonomy and without too much Government or commercial interests.

It was also hoped that the formation of the co-operative would help save the Urban Camp from demolition.

The co-operative undertook a major \$3.9 million redevelopment - commencing in 1999 and completed in 2003.

The redevelopment had been first proposed in 1996 and supported by the Liberal Government.

Initially, there was a division of opinion on the board about the proposed redevelopment. The basis of concern about the redevelopment was threefold - the support of a Liberal Government whose values were not seen as compatible. the perceived enormity of the capital involved and the commercialisation of the co-operative.

After discussion, it was resolved that the future of the Urban Camp depended on the redevelopment - without it the Urban Camp would not exist today.

It was realised that thousands of young Victorians would be affected by the redevelopment decision. Some of the board quickly accepted the need for redevelopment. Some were reluctant and following - accepting that their personal ideals should not prevent the redevelopment.

Resident groups opposed the development - the Royal Park Protection Association, the Parkville Association and the North West Association.

This opposition delayed the development for 18 months - with the opponents finally defeated in the Supreme Court.

The redevelopment preserved the heritage values of the Camp buildings and enhanced the natural assets of the surrounding parkland. In 2000 Anzac Hall was put on the Victorian Heritage Register as Significant.

Victorian Heritage Register Online

The Camp is leased from Melbourne City Council.

A majority of the members (500) are government and private schools, The remaining (250) include sporting groups, disability groups, organisations such as the Red Cross and St John's Ambulance Service and individuals.

There are seven on the board of the co-operative representing a country primary school, a country regional education office, a student exchange association, Netball Victoria, the Country Community Association and a local community person with extensive NT Aboriginal associations. f the co-operative. The Manager, Patrick O'Sullivan, is also on the board.

Today the co-operative provides bunk accommodation with 16 dormitories . There are three accommodation areas comprising rooms of 4 - 8 beds - accommodation for up to 120 people. There are also two multi-purpose rooms. There is no TV for free to air or pay-tv channels.

Prior to the redevelopment approximately 4000 people were attending the camp each year. Since the redevelopment, attendances have increased to approximately 8000 a year - representing between 180/200 groups including about 120 schools. The return business is about 80%.

The Education Officer at the Camp will plan and book a group's itinerary.

Every two years the Camping Association of Victoria undertakes an occupancy rate survey. In the last survey, 80 camps throughout Australia responded and the industry average occupancy rate was 37%. The Urban Camp's occupancy rate is 70%. In Victoria there are 140 accredited camp sites and 60 that are not accredited.



Urban Camp, Royal Park, Victoria, Courtyard

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